



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 3, 2003

Ms. Joanne Wright
Associate General Counsel
Texas Department of Transportation
125 E. 11th Street
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

OR2003-6153

Dear Ms. Wright:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 187073.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for the name and date of any contractor performing construction at a specified location within the last five years. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

Initially, we note that a portion of the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022 provides in relevant part:

(a) Without limiting the amount or kind of information that is public information under this chapter, the following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure under this chapter unless they are expressly confidential under other law:

¹We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. See Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). Here, we do not address any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

(1) a completed report, audit, evaluation, or investigation made of, for, or by a governmental body, except as provided by Section 552.108[.]

Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(1). We have marked the submitted information that constitutes completed reports. Accordingly, you must release these reports under section 552.022(a)(1) unless the information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 or is expressly confidential under other law. You argue that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103. This section is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects the governmental body's interests and is therefore not other law that makes information expressly confidential for purposes of section 552.022(a).² *See Dallas Area Rapid Transit v. Dallas Morning News*, 4 S.W.3d 469 (Tex. App.-Dallas 1999, no pet.) (government body may waive section 552.103); Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (governmental body may waive litigation exception, section 552.103); 522 at 4 (1989) (discretionary exceptions in general). Therefore, you may not withhold the submitted reports under section 552.103 of the Government Code, and they must be released.

In regard to the remaining submitted information, section 552.103 provides, in relevant part:

(a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person's office or employment, is or may be a party.

...

(c) Information relating to litigation involving a governmental body or an officer or employee of a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) only if the litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

The department has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show that the section 552.103(a) exception is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing that (1) litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Texas Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479, 481 (Tex. App.--Austin 1997, no pet.); *Heard v. Houston Post*

²Discretionary exceptions are intended to protect only the interests of the governmental body, as distinct from exceptions which are intended to protect information deemed confidential by law or the interests of third parties. Discretionary exceptions therefore do not constitute "other law" that makes information confidential.

Co., 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.--Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). The department must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under 552.103(a).

To establish that litigation is reasonably anticipated, a governmental body must provide this office "concrete evidence showing that the claim that litigation may ensue is more than mere conjecture." Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. *Id.* In Open Records Decision No. 638 (1996), this office stated that a governmental body has met its burden of showing that litigation is reasonably anticipated when it receives a notice of claim letter and the governmental body represents that the notice of claim letter is in compliance with the requirements of the Texas Tort Claims Act (the "TTCA"), chapter 101 of the Texas Civil Practice & Remedies Code. You state that the department received a notice of claim letter that met the requirements of the TTCA on May 22, 2003. You have provided this office with a copy of this letter. The claim raised in this letter relates to the same incident that is the subject of the current request for information. Therefore, we find that you have established that litigation was reasonably anticipated on the date of your receipt of the request for information. We further conclude that you have made the requisite showing that the requested information relates to that anticipated litigation for purposes of section 552.103(a). Thus, you may withhold the remaining requested information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

Generally, however, once information has been obtained by all parties to the litigation through discovery or otherwise, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Thus, information that has either been obtained from or provided to the opposing party in the anticipated litigation is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a), and it must be disclosed. Further, the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation has been concluded. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).

In summary, we conclude that: 1) the submitted reports are subject to section 552.022(a)(1) of the Government Code and must be released; and 2) the department may withhold the remaining requested information under section 552.103 of the Government Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full

benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

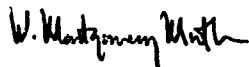
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



W. Montgomery Meitler
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

WMM/lmt

Ref: ID# 187073

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. James E. Pennington
8333 Douglas Ave., Suite 975
Dallas, Texas 75225
(w/o enclosures)